

The Healthy Berrien Consortium

Racism is a Threat to the Health of Berrien County

Racism hurts so many of our community members, and in turn it hurts us all. We have lived with it for so long that its presence in our institutions can be masked and hard to see. It is systemic and it is a clear and present threat to the health and wellbeing of all residents of Berrien County. Because we are deeply invested in the health and wellbeing of the residents of Berrien County, we must also be dedicated to identifying and eliminating systemic racism.

Systemic racism is the kind that is embedded in the policies, practices, and norms of the organizations that we all rely on. It has an insidious way of blocking the links to many essential components of good health like access to meaningful educational opportunity, nutritious food, safe and secure housing, mobility, access to technology, and yes, quality healthcare. The results are disproportionately high rates of hypertension, diabetes, cancers, and other illnesses in Black, Hispanic and indigenous Native American communities. Trauma-induced mental health challenges are faced by these communities along with its associated infirmities and diseases.

As a network of organizations charged with promoting the health of the people of Berrien County, we are fully committed to not only acknowledging the scourge of racism and its health effects, but to demonstrably act on that knowledge. We are determined that our actions will lead to better health outcomes for the people of Berrien County. We are also determined that those outcomes will show no disparity by race. To that end we pledge the following:

First, we pledge to identify and address the ways in which racism is embedded in our own organizational policies, practices, and norms. To live up to this pledge we will:

- Authentically engage those most adversely impacted to help us identify and change those racist policies, practices, and norms; and
- Dedicate the required human, financial and other resources to create racially equitable policy, practice, and normative change.

Second, we pledge to advance regional health equity by sharing our vision and providing practical guidance to other Berrien County organizations. To live up to this pledge, we will:

- Articulate, model and advance a collective awareness of the importance of racial equity in the health and wellbeing of Berrien County; and
- Provide practical information and resources to support the learning, growth and development of Berrien County organizations in their journeys to promote racial and health equity.

Healthy Berrien Consortium (HBC) is a network of public health and health care organizations and leaders formed to jointly undertake improving the health and well-being of Berrien County residents. Collaboratively, this group of organizations promote strategic actions to continuously improve the health and wellness of the entire community.